

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of November 26, 2019**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, Kenneth W. Goslant, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Gail Hall (Northfield Energy Committee), Denise MacMartin (Northfield Energy Committee), Sally Davidson (Recreation Committee), Cassie Morse (Northfield Farmers Market), Charles Morse (Northfield Farmers Market), Kaitlyn Keating (Northfield Community Development Network), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), David Feinauer (Northfield Community Development Network), Jean Kerner (Northfield Community Development Network), John Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), Bethany Drum, Kelli Cheney, Brett Campbell, Mary Dollenmaier, Mark Fournier, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Chair Maxwell said Cassie Morse, President of the Northfield Farmers Market, would be added to the agenda under "Public Participation."

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. Gail Hall, Northfield Energy Committee (NEC): Informational Kiosk Update.** Before Ms. Hall spoke, fellow NEC member Denise MacMartin reminded residents that the "Northfield Smart Commute Survey 2019" that the NEC has distributed is due back by November 30, 2019. The survey are available at the Northfield Municipal Building and the NEC Facebook page. One completed survey will be chosen at random and a \$50 Kenyon's Hardware gift certificate awarded.

At the last meeting (11/12/19), Ms. Hall suggested four (4) potential locations on or near Depot Square for the informational kiosk. She since has spoken to representatives from the United Church and Community Bank and they have reservations about siting the kiosk on or near their properties. Ms. Hall did note the ongoing Northfield Ridge + River Routes project, which is funded through grant funds from the Better Connections program, matches well with the informational kiosk concept as there will be plans devised to help develop additional transportation options in the downtown area. Ms. Hall will be back for the next regular meeting (12/10/19) with proposals ready for Select Board action.

- b. Sally Davidson, Recreation Committee: Common Tree Lighting Celebration.** Ms. Davidson first wanted to thank the Select Board members for their support for the "Trunk or Treat" on the Common on Halloween night. Despite the rain and high winds, the event was successful with over four hundred (400) children taking part. Ms. Davidson said the annual tree lighting will take place on Friday, December 6, 2019. The festivities will start will caroling at 5:45 p.m. with the tree lighting at 6:00 p.m. This will be followed by the traditional arrival of Santa and Mrs. Claus by firetruck. Chair Maxwell asked how the holiday decoration of the downtown area was coming along. Ms. Davidson said all was proceeding well.

- c. Cassie Morse, Northfield Farmers Market: Outdoor Winter Market.** Ms. Morse said an outdoor winter market would be held in conjunction with the tree lighting ceremony and the vendors will be selling their wares from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. A new feature this year will be the display on and around the Common of various works of art from the new Depot Square business, Art, Inc. The final list of vendors is still being developed.

Chair Maxwell asked if alcohol will be served at the outdoor market. Ms. Morse confirmed the Woods Lodge will be making use of its own liquor license to sell alcoholic beverages. Due to the Common's defined perimeter, special fencing will not be required. Bethany Drum noted the annual tree lighting ceremony was intended as a family event and she doesn't feel alcohol consumption should be part of the festivities.

- d. **Kaitlyn Keating, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN): Proposal for Economic Development Director Position.** Ms. Keating said the NCDN is making a formal request that the Select Board adjust their proposed FY 2020/2021 municipal budget to fund a new position: Economic Development Director. The NCDN members feel strongly Northfield would benefit greatly by this action as neighboring communities have taken this step and as a result have been able to attract new businesses while helping existing ones expand their operations. Ms. Keating said the Northfield community has many valuable assets (i.e., Norwich University, a municipal-owned electric department, covered bridges, Cabot Hosiery, etc.) as well as being located in the geographic center of the state. Having an Economic Development Director in place would ensure these advantages are properly utilized in the future. In addition, both the downtown area and Northfield Falls now are designated as Village Centers. Existing or new businesses could be eligible for tax breaks and other benefits as a result. The Economic Development Director could assist these businesses with the required paperwork, let them know what benefits are available, etc. The new position also could take some current responsibilities away from the Town Manager and/or Zoning Administrator. On a personal note, Ms. Keating works for a small company in Waterbury that was able to expand operations when the Economic Development Director there helped them find larger office space, helped with ADA-compliance issues, and informed them of available tax credits.

Ms. Keating said the NCDN is recommending a three-year initial trial period for this position. The base salary for this new part-time employee is estimated at about \$30,000. The suggestion is that for the first year, two-thirds of the salary would be covered by existing economic development funds and the rest budgeted (i.e., tax-supported). In the second year, the economic development fund would cover one-third of the salary and the rest budgeted. In the third year, the entire salary would be a line item in the municipal budget. Whether this experiment would be continued would depend on whether certain defined goals, such as expanding the tax base, are met. Ms. Keating noted a number of local businesses signed a public letter last year asking for a Northfield Economic Development Director.

Board member Miller noted Montpelier's Economic Development Director recently resigned and asked if it would be difficult to retain someone in this position. Ms. Keating said the person left to take another job opportunity and it had nothing to do with the position itself. Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members will have a full discussion of this proposal during its upcoming budget meetings. Board member Miller would like the NCDN members involved early in the process. Should the Select Board members decide not to budget this position in the next fiscal year, the NCDN members should be given sufficient time to petition (if they choose) in order to place this matter on the Town Meeting warning. Chair Maxwell agreed and then thanked Ms. Keating for this interesting proposal.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **November 12, 2019 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Goslant, to approve the minutes. Board member Goodrich wanted it clarified that during the discussion of the repairs to a Northfield Police Department (NPD) Ford Explorer, she did not suggest taking the vehicle out of town for repairs. She merely thought it might be more cost-effective should the situation arise again to take it to a local mechanic rather than a dealership. **Motion to approve the revised minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #10-20.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #10-20 in the amount of \$317,334.02. Board member Doney felt the company currently handling billing services for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) did a poor job recently that required sending out Medicare refunds. He asked when the municipality would have the opportunity to perhaps hire someone else. Manager Schulz said RFPs for NAS billing services have been sent out and are due early next year. He then will provide the bids received to the Select Board members so they can decide what action to take. Board member Doney noted a \$10,000 charge to install radio and safety equipment on a NPD cruiser. Manager Schulz said this work was done earlier this year but the NPD Chief wasn't satisfied with the work done so a reduced price was negotiated. When another NPD cruiser recently needed similar work, another company was hired that did a better job for less money. Chair Maxwell noted a payment for "Mud Season/Stone." Manager Schulz said this road material was purchased and put into the stockpile for use next year. Chair Maxwell noted payments for sludge transportation and asked if this was budgeted. Manager Schulz said this was an unexpected expense that arose when Casella Waste Management said Northfield could no longer send its sludge to its Coventry landfill due to its "bad smell." Manager Schulz expects the line item for "Sludge Management" to have a \$5,000 overage so he is looking at less expensive alternatives. Since Casella has since received permission to expand the landfill, Board member Goslant asked if it was possible they might take our sludge again. Manager Schulz said steps have been taken to reduce the sludge's odor but we would need to have a Casella representative to come in and confirm it now passes their smell test. Manager Schulz will try to arrange this visit in the near future. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through November 17, 2019.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Goslant, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$111,017.18. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Overview of Proposed FY 2020/2021 Municipal Budget.** Manager Schulz said after numerous meetings with Department Heads and other parties, the initial draft of the FY 2020/2021 municipal budget has been prepared. This initial budget does have a significant increase (11.3%) in the amount to be raised by taxes. Total budget expenditures will increase by \$268,970, which includes a \$74,730 increase in the operations and maintenance (O&M) budget; a \$46,640 increase in debt; and a \$147,600 increase in capital expenditures and transfers. Manager Schulz noted non-property tax revenues remain static, which is common to most Vermont communities.

Manager Schulz then highlighted some of the departments that have higher or lower than average increases. For example, the Town Clerk's budget will increase 6.6% due to higher wages and benefits as well as an increase in the cost of software maintenance. The Board of Civil Authority's budget will see a 17.8% increase over the previous fiscal year mainly due to the August 2020 state primary and the November 2020 federal and state general election. The Listers' budget will be reduced by 9.2% based on past actual expenses. The Ambulance Service will have a 4% increase partly due to increased run pay. The Highway Department's O&M budget will increase 3.6% due to scheduled wage/benefits increases and well as increased spending on line stripping; street sweeping; and tire and chain purchases. Board member Goslant thinks we might need to spend more on tires and chains given past experience. Chair Maxwell would like to save this discussion for the appropriate budget meeting(s).

Manager Schulz said the budget for the municipal pool will increase by 2.3%, mainly due to higher electrical costs. Since the pay for lifeguards was significantly increased a couple years ago, there is no need for wage increases this year. However, this can be discussed with Pool Director Shannon Palone when she meets with the Select Board members. The Planning/Zoning budget will decrease 7% based on past actual expenses.

Manager Schulz said there would be a \$46,000 increase in municipal debt largely due to the paving projects on Cox Brook Road and Union Brook Road. The increase was partially offset by some old debt coming off the books. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) will see a \$79,500 increase with most of this in the Highway CIP budget. The municipality received a \$75,000 grant from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to pave the west side of the South Main Street sidewalk so we will have to budget for the balance of this project, which is estimated at about \$175,000. There also are plans to apply for another VTrans grant in order to fix the Stony Brook Road Bridge. Even if the grant application is successful, the municipality will have to budget for the local share amount. There will be an increase in the Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget mainly due to the proposed purchase of a new tanker truck for the Northfield Fire Department (NFD). The increase will be partially offset by a transfer of funds from the NFD's brush truck account. The first budget meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 3, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room. All budget meetings will be advertised in advance on the municipal website and on Front Porch Forum. Chair Maxwell hopes as many people as possible will be able to attend.

- b. **Revised Northfield Town Plan: Public Hearings Schedule, etc.** Manager Schulz said the Planning Commission (PC) has completed its final draft of the revised Town Plan and held its required public hearing. The plan now goes to the Select Board so that two (2) additional public hearings can be held before the finalized document can be formally approved. The recommendation from management is to hold these public hearings in conjunction with the Select Board regular meetings of January 14, 2020 and February 11, 2020. There was no objection. Should substantive changes be made after the first and/or second public hearing, the document would have to return to the PC for further action. If the document remains basically intact with only minor changes, the Select Board would be able to adopt it before it goes out for final approval by the regional planning commission. Manager Schulz noted that without an approved town plan in place, Northfield would be unable to apply for planning grants, etc.
- c. **Northfield Snowmobilers, Inc. (NSI) Trail Requests (Well Field, Fairground Road, & South View Road).** Manager Schulz noted NSI has made its annual request for a snowmobile trail through the Well Field. In addition, NSI would like to traverse the end of Fairground Road and part of South View Road in order to connect their trail system. In his memorandum, Utility Superintendent Patrick DeMasi has listed stipulations that must be accepted before allowing the Well Field trail, which include proper marking, no refueling on site, etc. Motion by Selectman Goodrich, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to approve the NSI request for a snowmobile trail through the Wellfield (provided the conditions in Superintendent DeMasi's memorandum are followed) and also allow snowmobile trails on Fairground Road and South View Road. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. New Business, etc.** Board member Doney wanted to commend former Chouinard Comfort Colors employee Jeremy Drown for starting a new screen printing business in part of the old Chouinard facility. Mr. Drown hopes to expand operations in the near future. Board member Goslant also commended Cabot Hosiery for its renovations at the Nantanna Mill to create a packing, storage, and shipping facility for its popular Darn Tough Vermont brand.
- b. Returning Municipal Employee.** Board member Goslant wanted to thank retired employee Denise Gabaree for coming back to work part-time in the Accounting Department while another employee is taking time off due to family illness.
- c. Water/Sewer Infrastructure Schedule.** Board member Goslant would like to see a schedule showing when it is anticipated new water or sewer lines will be installed on certain streets. With the budget meetings approaching, he doesn't want funds set aside for paving specific streets during the next fiscal year when there are imminent plans to tear the road up for utility projects.
- d. New Utility Connection, etc.** Board member Doney thanked the Water/Sewer Department employees for installing lines to a new house on Traverse Street/Union Street without disrupting the new pavement in the area. Manager Schulz noted these employees also worked with a King Street homeowner to fix a problem there. Board member Doney believes additional work is needed on King Street next spring to eliminate the current problem of stormwater flowing into yards and driveways.
- e. NAVI Christmas Tree and Wreath Sale.** Chair Maxwell noted Northfield Ambulance Volunteers, Inc. (NAVI) will be holding its annual tree and wreath sale at the Ambulance Bay. Trees and wreaths come in a variety of sizes and are available for sale from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. during the week and from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekends. Free delivery is available. New this year is that the local Cub Scout troop will be picking up old trees after the holidays for donations. Old trees also can be dropped off at the United Methodist Church the first two Sundays of the New Year (01/05/20 and 01/12/20).

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. South Main Street Dip.** Manager Schulz has been in contact with Norwich University (NU) representatives regarding the bump in the road near Crawford Hall where old pavement meets new. It is expected the bump will subside a bit once winter sets in but additional work will be done if it doesn't. A complete repair of the site will be done next spring.
- b. South Main Street Stormwater/CSO Project Update.** Manager Schulz said Dufresne Associates are still working on the final design plans for this project. These plans should be ready for Select Board review in the next couple months. Manager Schulz reached out to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to inquire if additional funds were available for the planning phase of this project. He learned \$30,000 was on hand to help cover engineering costs. It seems ANR is pleased with the work done to date on this project and with similar projects that were completed here over the past few years.
- c. Union Street/Water Street Manholes.** At the previous meeting, there were concerns raised by a resident about the height of the manholes where the new paving was done on Union Street and Water Street. Manager Schulz inspected the area himself and as a result will have the Highway Department fill in the gaps so they don't stick up too far.

- d. **Dump Trucks Warranties.** Manager Schulz said at the last meeting new springs were installed on a couple dump trucks in order to increase their carrying capacity. Concerns were raised then about whether this work would void the vehicles' warranties. He has been assured it will not. Board member Goslant would like this confirmed in writing.
- e. **East Street Lighting.** Manager Schulz said the new East Street light standards have arrived and he has asked Utility Superintendent DeMasi to make their installation a priority. It is expected the work will be completed before Christmas.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. **Kelli Cheney: Town Budget Process.** Ms. Cheney asked how many separate budget meetings are scheduled over the next couple months. Chair Maxwell said ten (10) were currently scheduled. There has been discussion of holding a longer Saturday meeting in order to eliminate at least two of them. Ms. Cheney asked if the draft budget would be available online. Manager Schulz said it would. There also would be updates posted as the process goes forward. Ms. Cheney asked what would be the Select Board members' priorities during the budget process. Chair Maxwell said it has been recent practice to focus on public safety and making sure that our emergency services and Highway Department have the proper workforce and equipment to make this a safer community. There also are state mandates to consider. Last year, the Select Board members budgeted significant increases in the gravel/stone line items in order to address problems on our backroads. In addition, Northfield's Road Surface Management System (RSMS) program has been updated to better assist in setting road paving priorities. Board member Goslant added that the Select Board members also listen to residents when they express their views on what should be done with their tax dollars. There also is a need to balance the need for certain government services with keeping the local tax rate reasonable. Chair Maxwell noted Northfield is still feeling the effects of Tropical Storm Irene, which destroyed a number of local structures and thus reduced our Grand List. Ms. Cheney has some concerns about the expense of operating the municipal pool for two (2) month each summer as well as what is needed to keep the Green Mountain Transit (GMT) Northfield-Montpelier Commuter Bus in operation in future years. She plans to attend the budget meetings so she can express these concerns. Board member Maxwell thanked Ms. Cheney for her interest and he encouraged other residents to also participate in the budget process this year. He noted Elroy Hill made a special effort last year to attend all the budget meetings.
- b. **Brett Campbell: GMT Commuter Bus Service.** Mr. Campbell is a returning Northfield resident who relies on this bus service to get to his Montpelier employment. He asked the Select Board members to think beyond ridership numbers, etc. and remember that this is a vital service to many residents, especially those living on low or fixed incomes.

XI. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Goslant, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of December 10, 2019.